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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Education

PARTICIPANTS: Dr. Avelino Porto, Rector of Belgrano University
Dr. Jorge Vanossi, lawyer and law professor
Yvonne Thayer, Political Officer
F. A. Harris, Political Officer

DATE: September 26, 1977

PLACE: El Duende Restaurant

DISTRIBUTION: Chargé
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ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

(X) Release () Excise () Deny

Exemption(s):

Declassify: () In Part (X) In Full DECONTROL

() Classify as () Extend as () Downgrade to

Date Declassify on Reason

Dr. Porto proved to be an attractive, articulate, extremely bright and well-informed educator with a broad range of interests and capabilities. Trained as a lawyer, Dr. Porto began his career in the early 1950's assisting a Federal Court judge and teaching law at the University of Buenos Aires. Several years later, while Porto was still in his 20's he joined friends in founding the University of Belgrano. As rector (president) of that institution, Porto has guided the university's expansion into what is now the largest private university in Argentina. Well known as a writer, educator and administrator, Dr. Porto is currently vice-president of the Association of Rectors of Private Latin American Universities.

Dr. Porto displayed considerable interest in academic subjects--he lectures in law and history at Belgrano--literature, education, and Argentine politics. He claims affiliation to no political party, but he is acutely sensitive to the political nature of Argentine education. During our luncheon, Dr. Porto made the following observations:

The Ministry of Education: Minister Catalán is an unfortunate mistake, a man with no background in academia and no real interest in education. Catalan is most interested in promoting his own candidacy as a civilian Interior Minister, as his and other circles believe that the Junta will eventually replace the present Interior Minister Army General Harguindeguy with a civilian to please the political parties and democratic forces. The Education Ministry is at a complete standstill, no new policies are being developed; there is no guidance, no direction and no money.

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Private activity in education: Although the Education Ministry is moribund, privately educators are working on policy for the future. Belgrano has assembled eight "working groups" of prominent educators to study educational policy. Their research will hopefully be useful when the government eventually becomes interested in reviving the education sector.

Education budget: State expenditure for education is at an all-time low. A decade ago, Education got approximately 25% of the Federal budget, roughly the percentage expended in countries like Brazil, Venezuela and Mexico today. Now, Education receives only 7.4% of the state budget. Cuts in resources to the educational sector result from two reasons: One, education doesn't "show" like other government-funded social projects such as housing; and two, when Argentine governments, whether civilian or military, are upset with the country's social and administrative failings, they tend to blame the education sector. A cut in resources is a form of punishment. Belgrano University, which charges about \$400 in annual matriculation tuition, doesn't pay its professors much more than public institutions. Like other universities, it has lost some staff.

Internal Security: Although some Belgrano students have disappeared and others have been detained for subversive activities, Belgrano University did not suffer massive purges in the internal security campaign. It did not have security agents infiltrating the student body. Porto spent considerable time and effort with students to minimize damage during student demonstrations and alienation in early 1970's and during Peronist regime.

The Ministry is conducting an anti-subversive education campaign among secondary school and university administrators. Courses are being given to help administrators identify subversive instructors, and libraries are being checked for subversive books. Porto has resisted Ministry pressures not to rehire several suspected professors.

Educational policy: Porto is opposed to centralized educational planning to the extent that the State determines the number of persons who can enter the university and allocates openings in the various professional schools. He also opposes State-determined hiring, promotion, tenure and salary policies for faculty. He believes the government should establish a basic educational philosophy and guidelines which would be the responsibility of each university rector to carry out in his own institution. Porto is distressed by the low priority and budget for scientific research.

Educational exchange: As vice-president of the Association of Rectors of Latin American Private Universities, Porto would like to have more contact with U.S. educators and university administrators.

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